

1ST MALAYSIA-INDONESIA PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES CONFERENCE 2009 &
2ND WORLD CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR & FAMILY BUSINESS ASSOCIATION 2009
Hosted by Universiti Industri Selangor / 29-30 October 2009 Blue Wave 5* Hotel Shah Alam Selangor Malaysia

SPEAKER'S PROFILES



ANUWAR ALI, PROF. EMERITUS DR., TAN SRI

Professor Emeritus Anuwar Ali currently holds the post of President/Vice Chancellor of Open University Malaysia. He is also the Chief Executive Officer of Multimedia Technology Enhancement Operations Sdn. Bhd. (METEOR) which is the holding company of Open University Malaysia. Prior to this, he was the Director of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education as well as the Vice Chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

Professor Anuwar's expertise in industrial and technology development has benefited the Malaysian Government when he was appointed as a Consultant to prepare the Industrial Master Plan (1986–95), Action Plan for Technology Development and the Action Plan for Small and Medium–Scale Industries. He was also Chairman, Malaysia Examinations Council, Member of the Asia Pacific Council of Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, a Board Member of Bank Pembangunan Malaysia, a Member of the Securities Commission, SIRIM Training Services Sdn. Bhd and INTI University College.

1st Malaysia-Indonesia Private Universities Conference 2009
**2nd World Conference of International Entrepreneur &
Family Business Association 2009**

Grand Blue Wave Hotel Shah Alam, Selangor
29 & 30 October 2009

**OUM AS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL AND
NETWORKING UNIVERSITY: A UNIQUE
EXPERIMENT**

By:

Prof Emeritus Anuwar Ali
President/ Vice-Chancellor
Open University Malaysia
anuwarali@oum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

With globalisation and the increasing pace of market competition, universities have a key role to play in the economic growth of a country. They need to transform from being just an institution of learning into an entrepreneurial and networking university while simultaneously championing the need for quality education. This paper examines how Open University Malaysia (OUM) successfully operates as such a university, especially in the context of its vision and mission. The milestones and progress of the university since its inception are presented, followed by an analysis of the reasons for OUM becoming an entrepreneurial university and developing beneficial networks at the international level. The launch of OUM International, a strategic unit in charge of forging global collaborations, is highlighted together with the many diverse initiatives it has taken up. Another milestone in OUM's achievements is an e-learning collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia whereby the university is involved in providing consultancy and technical assistance to establish an e-learning platform that caters to Saudi needs. The final part of this paper presents the lessons learnt from OUM's experiences. These lessons are being given due consideration by the university in its goal to become even more enterprising and innovative in the years to come.

INTRODUCTION

Open University Malaysia (OUM) was set up in the year 2000 as the seventh private university in Malaysia. Although there are numerous other universities, both private and public, in the country, OUM is unique as it is actually a private company owned by a consortium of 11 public universities. It is the first of its kind in Malaysia and perhaps also in the Asian region.

The University's vision is to become the "leading provider of flexible learning". This leads to its mission, which is "to widen access to quality education and provide lifelong learning opportunities by leveraging on technology, adopting a flexible mode of learning and providing a conducive and engaging learning environment at a competitive and affordable cost."

The aim of this paper is to examine how OUM successfully operates as an entrepreneurial and networking university in the context of its vision and mission. Entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly important to economic growth. This is all the more relevant for Malaysia given its important role as a trading nation for many centuries. With globalisation and the increasing pace of competition, a big challenge for the nation is in enhancing its human capital which includes professionals, scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs and others. Universities have a key role to play in this trend by grooming entrepreneurs and contributing to the development of entrepreneurship. For universities to play this role effectively, they must become responsive to the changing needs of local and global trends and markets.

Universities also need to shift from having collaborations with only government agencies to also having and increasing collaborations and partnerships with other educational institutions as well as business and corporate entities. Thus, universities need to transform themselves from being just an institution of learning into an entrepreneurial and networking university while simultaneously championing the need for quality education.

This paper will discuss OUM's role as such a university, which could also be called an "educational enterprise". Being a newly established education provider, all the more because it is a non-traditional campus university, it has to learn and adapt from the experiences that similar ODL institutions have gone through in their respective countries. While this is so, OUM, over the past nine years, has gone through tremendous change from which several lessons can be learnt. This aspect will also be highlighted in this paper.

2. MILESTONES AND PROGRESS OF OUM

Since its inception in 2000, OUM has established itself as the main open and distance learning (ODL) provider in the country. Beginning with just four programmes, the University now offers 71 programmes, which includes 11 that were introduced last year alone. In addition, although OUM is headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, learners throughout the country need not travel all the way to the capital to attend tutorials or any other university activities. Instead, they can go to one of the more than 60 learning centres available nationwide.

OUM's main goal is to democratise education so that opportunities to further studies are available to the masses, particularly working adults who wish to attain higher academic qualifications for better job prospects or career paths. Great strides have been made in attaining this goal. OUM's programmes are available to all Malaysians, including rural dwellers, senior citizens, the underprivileged, the physically disadvantaged and even prison inmates. In terms of student numbers, the University has progressed tremendously from just 753 learners in August 2001 to a cumulative intake of almost 90,000 learners at the beginning of the September semester this year. Thus far, 13,000 learners have graduated, with another 7,000 due to receive their scrolls in November this year. By 2010, OUM aims to achieve the status of a mega university with a total cumulative intake of 100,000 or more.

The University's large intake of learners is partly due to support and recognition from the Malaysian government. Under a partnership with the Ministry of Education, OUM has admitted a total of 35,000 in-service teachers, who were mainly diploma holders, into its degree programmes offered via the Faculty of Education and Languages.

This partnership is an integral part of the ministry's plan to ensure that by 2010, at least 50% of its teachers in primary schools possess at least a bachelor's degree. According to the Mid-Term Review of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), the figure stood at 13.7% in 2007. Under the Plan, RM577.7 million (equivalent to US\$164.6 million) has been allocated for the Special Degree Programme for Non-Graduate Teachers. The fact that OUM has been chosen to aid in reaching the ministry's objective signifies the recognition of its ability and commitment to raising the quality of teachers. It is a win-win situation for all, including the teachers, who are able to continue teaching at their schools while upgrading their qualifications.

In addition, OUM offers an array of ODL programmes through its collaboration locally with the Ministry of Defence (particularly the Royal Malaysian Air Force and the Royal Malaysian Military Force) and retailer Aeon Jusco, as well as internationally to Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Bahrain, Yemen, Singapore, Vietnam, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and others. OUM's internationalisation of its programmes serves as an answer to the Malaysian government's call to help transform the country into a centre of academic excellence. As an example, in 2009, OUM clinched a mega project with the Bangladesh Computer Council which, funded, by the World Bank, hopes to provide ICT

training to almost 2,500 senior officials in Bangladesh. The success of this project underscores the University's credibility as a learning institution.

Another good example of OUM's collaboration is with a well-known multinational in initiating the Executive Diploma in Manufacturing Management (EDDM) programme in 2006 with Nestle. The design of this 20-month long programme is based on the research and analysis of the required job functions of First Line Managers in Nestle factories in Malaysia, aiming at delivering specific workplace competencies. It is hoped that a similar programme can be adopted in other Nestle factories worldwide when the e-Learning component has been fully developed and tested.

3. UNIQUE MODEL AS AN EDUCATION PROVIDER AND ENTERPRISE

The birth of OUM is a unique story in itself. In 1998, a consortium of 11 public universities in Malaysia was incorporated as Multimedia Technology Enhancement Operation Sendirian Berhad (METEOR). The main role of the consortium was to develop multimedia technological applications for the education sector. In March 2000, a wholly-owned subsidiary of METEOR called Unitem Sendirian Berhad was formed, paving the way for the establishment of OUM. Thus, in short, OUM is a private university with ownership by public universities.

Despite being created as a private university and earlier referred to as an "educational enterprise," OUM's guiding principle, unlike that of most privately owned universities, is not based on the need to generate profits for its owners but to generate enough surplus from its revenue after taking into account its operating and capital costs. The surplus is then ploughed back towards ensuring that quality education becomes the main thrust of OUM's activities. This is achieved by using the funds for continuous upgrading of the University's academic and supporting staff, paying and training its tutors as well as enhancing the quality of its learning centres, e-Learning and IT infrastructure and learners' services.

Being a university which is learner-centred and carries its corporate social responsibility seriously, OUM has not, however, increased its student fees right from the first intake in 2001. This is quite an achievement given the increasing costs of employing and training tutors nationwide as well as maintaining existing premises and purchasing new ones. Nevertheless, OUM is being sustained because of rapid increases in its enrolment from year to year.

At the same time, OUM is always mindful of its long-standing strategy of maintaining a lean organisation such that it is able to sustain a reasonable level of revenue every year. Being lean also means that OUM's staff at every level are encouraged to be multi-skilled, thus propagating a culture of positive "teamwork." The latter is an important component of OUM's "shared values" which have been adopted as our culture. The other components are integrity, professionalism, caring and innovativeness.

It is by inculcating these positive values in the University's daily activities that OUM has been able to bring forward new ideas and initiatives at every operational level, thus making it entrepreneurial. Thus, OUM has been able to provide quality services to its learners without any hindrance. When the University emphasises quality services, and thus quality education, it pays off in terms of low attrition rate amongst the learners. When compared to most ODL providers in other countries, the attrition rate (about 20 to 25 percent annually) is amongst the lowest as most other ODL institutions will have to face an attrition rate of between 40 and 50 percent.

In terms of governance, OUM has a flexible structure yet it is accountable to its Board of Directors. The Board decides on the appointment of the University's President, Senior Vice President and Vice Presidents. This practice is unlike that of public universities, where these appointments are made by the Minister of Higher Education. Decision-making is also fast and effective, whereby most decisions that are administrative in nature are taken by the President or the University's top management. For this reason, the University is able to implement any initiative with flexibility and a sense of urgency.

Due to its nature, OUM is able to leverage on the quality, prestige and capabilities of the 11 public universities. It utilises the resources of these shareholders by taking on their faculty members as subject matter experts, tutors and consultants. This means that while OUM employs a relatively small number of faculty members, its actual academic capacity extends beyond its faculties. Hence, while OUM remains relatively compact with fewer than 80 faculty members at present, thousands of other universities' academic staff play a crucial role in catering to its more than 35,000 learners every semester. The University also rents the premises of the public universities and makes use of their libraries, which were especially necessary in the initial years of OUM's growth.

With its relatively rapid enrolment figures and success at building a "*branding*" as an ODL provider at the national level, the question may arise as to why OUM has become such an entity; and more significantly, why it has to be *an entrepreneurial university and develop beneficial networks* at the international level as well. There are several answers to this.

(a) *University for All*

In almost every nation, increasingly one finds increasing awareness of lifelong learning. The term "*lifelong learning*" involves a cradle-to-grave perspective, which recognises that learning occurs at all stages of life, in different forms and in a variety of arenas. Currently, lifelong learning is manifested in the form of extension programmes, distance learning programmes and technology-based online learning programmes. OUM's programmes are based on the philosophy of lifelong learning. In line with its motto "*University for All*," OUM provides people with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills throughout their life, so that they could function well in society and keep up with the constantly changing demands of their working life.

(b) *Demand for Higher Education and Student Mobility*

One factor driving OUM to enhance the number of its academic programmes in the last three years as well as "*going international*" is the apparent rise in the demand for university places almost everywhere and the rate of increase in student mobility worldwide. This phenomenon is expected to grow rapidly in the years to come as a result of higher incomes, thus making the issue of affordability becoming less significant for an increasing number of parents even in developing countries. In addition, travelling costs during the past two decades have relatively decreased, thereby encouraging greater mobility of people among nations. According to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there are more than three million tertiary students enrolled outside their country of citizenship in 2007, which is a 3.3%

increase from the previous year in total foreign student intake reported to the OECD and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.¹

The increase in the demand for university places, with its attendant impact on the pressure for school-leavers to succeed in getting university education, also meant that working people, especially those below 45 years old, are keener to get better qualifications; thus “second-chance” opportunities have to be created, preferably via ODL for them. It is from this perspective that accessibility becomes an important selling point for ODL institutions like OUM.

(c) *Increasing Role of the Private Sector*

With a rapid increase in the demand for higher education, sometimes outstripping the ability of state-owned universities to fulfil the need, the private sector is taking a leading role in higher education globally. Malaysia provides a good example of this trend. According to the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (Mapcu), there were some 450,000 students at private institutions of higher learning as at December last year. This accounted for slightly more than 50% of the total enrolment in both public and private universities and colleges.² If not for this new scenario in Malaysia’s higher education sector, and the introduction of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996, it would have been possible that OUM is established as a public sector or state-owned university, rather than what it is today.

To a large degree, this new scenario also provides the impetus for greater competition among private and public universities, in which the latter are trying hard to benchmark themselves against the top-ranking universities of the world. One of the outcomes is that the Ministry of Higher Education has identified four of the more established universities as “research universities,” which requires them to substantially increase their intake of postgraduate students and embark on industry-oriented research and innovation. In many ways, this pushes the universities to become more innovative and enterprising in order to network with industry and renowned universities in the more developed nations.

This trend will mean that the remaining public universities and private institutions will take up more undergraduate enrolment. This is indeed an excellent initiative which will logically allow the research universities to become centres of academic excellence and thus will have the capacity to develop their “niche areas” in postgraduate and research programmes. By the same token, it is anticipated that these universities, if they practice a “dual mode” approach that have distance learning programmes, will have to slowly withdraw such programmes as they will have to give priority to their “niche areas” if they are keen to be world-class universities.

(d) *Education as a Growing Services Sector*

According to the World Trade Organisation, the education sector is now a significant component of the services sector worldwide. Education plays a crucial role in promoting personal, social and economic development and reducing inequality. It also enables countries

¹ Jobbins, David. 13 Sept 2009. *More degrees for quicker recovery – OECD*. University World News. Issue 0092. London: Higher Education Web Publishing Ltd.

² Oh, Errol. 6 June 2009. *Challenges facing private education*. The Star. Selangor: Star Publications (M) Sdn Bhd.

to face the challenges of rapid technological advancement and increased global commercial integration. As noted above, given the strong demand for university places in every nation and the increasing student mobility worldwide, it has become pertinent for most countries to consciously develop their higher education sector as the driving force for national income generation. Malaysia is no exception in this respect, and OUM is also expected to play its role.

In addition, there is increasing worldwide demand for university places despite the current economic recession. With school-leavers and graduates facing a harsh job market and high levels of unemployment in the affected countries, more people are choosing to improve their academic qualifications. This applies equally to working people. OUM is in a sense benefiting from the current slowdown in the economy during which there has been a record increase in the intake of new students for the January and May 2009 semesters.

All of the above developments on the education front have impacted OUM in a positive way; thus challenging the university to strive harder and become entrepreneurial and innovative in its delivery system. For example, by using a *blended pedagogical approach*, the learners' learning experience has become most rewarding. It has three components – face-to-face tutorials, self-study print modules and an online learning platform. The approach is aimed at providing learners with holistic education by giving them attention and guidance through classroom interaction as well as the freedom and flexibility of learning at their own pace and convenience through online learning facilities.

The face-to-face tutorials are held every fortnight at the learning centre nearest to the learners. To aid their understanding, print modules are provided to enable them to study on their own. This is supplemented by a requirement that they also participate in online learning which is made possible through a *learning management system* called myLMS. In myLMS, facilitators and tutors use online forums to stimulate discussion to enhance learners' thinking skills and support them in increasing their ownership of their learning process. To supplement the three modes of learning, CD-ROM, audio/ video and web-based learning materials are provided.

The University is also exploring the use of *mobile technology*. In the middle of this year, a mobile learning initiative via text messaging was piloted for one of OUM's first semester courses entitled, "*Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learning*." The initiative was aimed at spurring learners to perform various learning tasks in a timely manner, feel guided on what or how to learn and be reminded of certain aspects of a course. In addition, motivational messages were also sent. The main objective of the mobile learning initiative is to complement the modules, tutorials and online forums.

Additional learning resources are available from OUM's *Tan Sri Dr Abdullah Samusi (TSDAS) Digital Library*. The library currently holds electronic resources from almost 30 different databases. Some are multi-disciplinary while others are specific to a particular field such as the sciences, information technology, business and management, education and nursing sciences. Altogether the Digital Library has more than 22,000 volumes of books and subscribes to over 72,500 e-books and 30,000 e-journals.

One of the most significant advantages of this digital collection is its accessibility for all registered learners, regardless of where they are and when they need it. Beginning this year,

the University is also planning to further promote the utilisation of the Digital Library's resources by incorporating them in the design of the University's academic programmes.

Overall, OUM learners get to experience a quality learning environment through the use of traditional and non-traditional strategies. As a newly established and entrepreneurial university, OUM's main thrust is to provide quality education as it believes this will sustain its momentum in attracting as many learners as possible. The components of the quality education include a commitment towards having excellent faculty members and tutors, quality modules and IT services as well as high-quality services in the learning centres located nationwide. To achieve these inter-related objectives, OUM has over the years established a number of supporting units and departments such as the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology (CIDT), Centre for Tutor Management and Development (CTMD), Institute of Quality, Research and Innovation (IQRI) and Learner Service Centre (LSC).

4. OUM INTERNATIONAL: PARTNERSHIP WITH OVERSEAS INSTITUTIONS

The ODL approach used by OUM has made it possible for potential learners in other countries to enrol in the University's programmes. It also began seeking to establish ties with other educational institutions outside Malaysia. This approach has been adopted by OUM based on the awareness that the overseas educational partners have intimate knowledge of the local education scenario, thus providing an excellent foundation for a workable and practical partnership. Consequently, in June 2008, the University launched *OUM International* to look into forging collaborations and synergistic relationships with other institutions of learning across the globe. Prior to this, OUM has built a network of strategic international partners in France, Yemen, Bahrain, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

OUM International offers programmes which comprise credit-bearing programmes, project management, customised training and fellowship programmes. It has also successfully managed extensive consultancies and customised short-term training programmes, which include a full range of support services. The areas covered are education, public administration, environmental education, financial management, health and information technology. ICT is used as a supplementary mode of instruction and a way of improving support services such as e-tutoring, online mark entry system, one-stop online student services, online discussion forum and the Digital Library.

OUM International's projects are facilitated by personnel from the 11 public universities as well as the private and public sectors within Malaysia. They were carefully selected for their expertise, experience and cultural sensitivity. Associate consultants from overseas attached to OUM are also roped in to implement the programmes. In addition, OUM International is a registered training provider with the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, UNESCO/UNDP and the European Union.

To date, OUM International has been involved in the following initiatives:

(a) Implementation of a Fully Online Programme

A new postgraduate programme, Master in Instructional Design and Technology (MIDT), was launched last January. This programme is taught by academicians from around the world including Canada, the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Denmark, Netherlands, Australia, the Middle East, the United Kingdom and Malaysia. Currently, 21 learners from

more than 15 countries are enrolled in this programme. Proctored online assessment is used, whereby a proctor is appointed to manage the online submission of assignments and participation in the discussion forum as well as oversee the online examination, which is held at designated venues. A first in Malaysia, MIDT is a breakthrough in the local education setting. It is also an example of OUM's openness to new ideas. MIDT uses myLMS as well as social networking platforms such as e-mail, blogs, Skype, Facebook, YouTube and Wikis to facilitate communication between learners and academics.

(b) Collaborations with Overseas Institutions in Offering Postgraduate Programmes Overseas

OUM's Centre for Graduate Studies (CGS) offers postgraduate programmes through four international institutions – Arab Open University in Bahrain, University of Science and Technology in Yemen, Universitas Nasional Riau Indonesia and Trent Global Education Group Singapore. OUM is also collaborating with the Accra Institute of Technology in Ghana to offer postgraduate programmes in the areas of engineering, computer science, business administration, science and education.

(c) Partnerships with Overseas Institutions in Offering Undergraduate Programmes Overseas

In July 2008, OUM began offering undergraduate programmes to learners in Maldives through collaboration with Villa College. More than 200 learners are enrolled in the fields of business administration, education administration and information technology. Under the collaboration, moderation of assignment and exam questions, endorsement of the appointment of the teaching staff, student admission criteria and yearly quality assurance audits are the responsibilities of OUM.

Future strategic alliances abroad are being explored. Last August, OUM signed an agreement with Hanoi University (HANU) to establish a joint Master of Business Administration Programme to train the senior administrative staff of the Vietnam Tea Association (VITAS) as well as to offer a joint Bachelor in Business Administration programme for students of HANU. Efforts are underway to begin offering these programmes in January 2010.

The successful internationalisation of OUM's programmes is due to several factors, apart from identifying the most appropriate strategic partner in each country. For instance, detailed discussions between the partners are held at the planning and implementation stages. Then, a matrix of responsibilities are developed with each partner. Next, OUM's blended pedagogy is used to deliver programmes which are both flexible and accessible. Consequently, both OUM and its partners have a win-win relationship which involves trust and collaboration for mutual benefit.

5. ICT PROJECT IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Another milestone in OUM's international-level efforts is a project called "Total e-Learning Solutions for the Ministry of Higher Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." OUM and its associate company, METEOR Technology and Consultancy Sendirian Berhad, were appointed as consultants for the project, which was to be implemented in two stages over a period of five years.

The first phase, which began in February 2007, saw the establishment of the National e-Learning Centre (NeLC) and the introduction of e-learning facilities in institutions of higher learning throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the nine months of the first phase, OUM experts went to Riyadh where they supplied and supervised the installation of learning management systems, recommended and oversaw the installation of infrastructures, trained Saudi IT personnel in courseware development and assisted the Kingdom's Ministry of Higher Education in carrying out awareness and promotion programmes on e-learning.

The second phase will begin soon with the geographical expansion of the e-learning facilities and making these available throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The strength of this relationship lies in the knowledge, especially from the perspective of the Ministry of Higher Education, KSA, that OUM and METEOR Technology and Consultancy can together deliver the e-learning platform that is of relevance to the Saudi environment.

6. LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

A critical stabilising and guiding factor in OUM's progress since its establishment is in instituting an Annual Planning and Budget Exercise which is preceded by the President's Business Policy Address to all the staff at a special assembly during which the Chief Executive shares with the staff the management's initial ideas on the short-term and long-term strategic thinking and priorities with special emphasis on the following year's major initiatives and policy thrusts. In preparing the Policy Address, the Corporate Planning Unit (CPU), which is responsible for the preparation of the exercise, will seek inputs from all the Faculties, Departments and Units within OUM.

This is done in line with the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) principles which is based on four perspectives – financial, customer, internal process and, learning and growth – which emphasise on quality, costs, productivity, innovativeness and operational efficiency. After the Policy Address, the various faculties, departments and units will then discuss the details of their budgetary requirements for the following year, after which the CPU will coordinate and collate to form the Budget requirements for the following year.

What is also significant is that the Annual Business Policy Address is shared with all the staff under the METEOR Group of Companies, which includes:

- METEOR Learning Sendirian Berhad (MLSB)
- METEOR Technology and Consultancy Sendirian Berhad (MTCBSB)
- METEOR Doc Sendirian Berhad (MDSB)
- Univision Press Sendirian Berhad (UPSB)

The lessons of the past years have always been pertinent in ensuring that these experiences are given due consideration by the management and the initiatives taken are adapted to suit changing circumstances and learners' needs. This section examines some of the important lessons, which OUM over the years has gone through, with the hope that the University, enriched by those experiences, will become more enterprising and innovative in the years to come. The lessons learnt are as follows:

- (a) It is crucial for the University to be even more learner-centred. This needs to be emphasised in OUM's yearly planning and budget exercise. Being learner-centred means that the University's delivery system and internal processes must be of the

highest quality. The impact, as noted earlier, will be of great significance for the University as reflected in the low attrition rate amongst the learners.

- (b) OUM staff must not only be able to strive hard in the face of new challenges but also be focused so that the University's objectives are met. The "shared values" are important in creating an excellent working environment. Training is also an important component in creating commitment and dedication to work, apart from instituting a salary scheme that is comparable to, if not better than, that of other education providers.
- (c) In the higher education sector, a provider must be able to leverage on ICT, including the Internet, to enhance the learning process of the students. Therefore, OUM needs to continuously enhance its e-learning, mobile learning and Digital Library services so that these are of the highest standard at all times and not only meet but also exceed the expectations of its learners.
- (d) In enhancing networking in international areas, there is a need to identify the right educational institutions with whom OUM has common objectives to ensure the success of the collaboration. The University must work out the details with the other party and each party must have the strong belief that the partnership will work and benefit both sides.
- (e) The medium term and yearly budget planning by OUM's Corporate Planning Unit (CPU), done with such meticulousness every year, is vital so that targets are realistically set and achieved within the University's existing capacity and human resources. This is the challenge that the CPU has to face given the forces of competition from other ODL providers.

7. CONCLUSION

As a private university which is continuously learning and guided by its past experiences, OUM has to find ways not only to sustain itself but also to develop new means and resources to propel itself as the leader in the realm of ODL. It also needs to constantly and consistently innovate in order to cater to the increasing demand for quality higher education not only in Malaysia but also across the national border. In view of this, instead of staying with the tried and tested, the University has chosen to tread new paths and seek new ventures with other institutions.

Collaborative partnerships with other institutions have been beneficial as these improve the quality of programmes offered. Such collaborations also generate income for both partners, widen participation of international learners and facilitate entry into new markets at the regional and international levels. In addition, resources can be shared by distributing costs among partners while expanding services to global learners. The result is the transformation of OUM into an entrepreneurial and networking university, the success of which is exhibited in its increasing student numbers as mentioned earlier.

In the coming years, OUM intends to continue pursuing the realisation of its vision and objectives by being entrepreneurial in its operations as well as by networking more extensively in the local and global arenas. It will also carry on with its quest to assist the

nation not only in transforming Malaysia into a centre of academic excellence but also in enhancing its capacity in terms of human capital via the delivery of quality education.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Razak Mohamed. (2007). Paving a Path to Saudi Arabia. *OUM Today*. Issue 33 – March/April. p3.
- Open University Malaysia. (2009). *Annual Report 2008*. Kuala Lumpur: Open University Malaysia.
- Raghavan, Santhi. (2009). Widening Cross-border Participation: Building ODL Communities through Internationalisation at Open University Malaysia. *Asean Journal of Open and Distance Learning*. 1(1), pp83-92.
- Zoraini Wati Abas, Lim, Tina and Tai Kwan, Woo. (2009). Mobile Learning Initiative Through SMS: A Formative Evaluation. *Asean Journal of Open and Distance Learning*. 1(1), pp49-58.